King of Hearts

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King of Hearts

by AskAStupidQuestion

Summary

Will fixes boats, Hannibal eats people, but this time there's chips on the table.

With Will falling into debt and the desperate for money, he finds himself at his last hope- the King of Hearts Casino- with the last of his money in one hand and the small set of skills his father had taught him as a child.

He feels fortunate, if it at first wary, when a smart suited man named Dr Chilton takes him under his wing. It doesn't turn out quite the way he expected.

Notes

So I found this in my drafts from 2018 (you may be able to tell...). This is unbeta-d so please excuse any tense accidents but I wanted to share anyway :) Fingers crossed!

See the end of the work for more notes

Will surveyed the ground floor with a vague anticipation beginning to churn in his gut. People milled around in swarms, necks craning over tables to make their own estimates, outcries of happiness and despair flaring up loudly once winners are called and the losers turn away from their risky gamble. Tonight, dressed in his half fitting suit, he was here to make some money.

The ground floor of the King of Hearts Casino was awash with gambling amateurs and holiday makers, with hotel rooms above that stretched up to the sky. It was comfortable enough for Will, whose creased suit blended into the blur of sweat and cheap polyester.

He sat down at the nearest roulette wheel, fiddling with the few chips he had afforded. The players around him seemed mediocre at best: three laughing young women who collapsed in giggles after every bet, a chortling plump industrialist and his younger associate, and the fleeting few that floated from table to table. There was a distinct cocktail of sanitiser and beer that lingered in the fabrics of the walls.

He eyed up his options on the wheel, trying to calculate a way to maximise his profit if he won. Black or red? A 1:1 pay-out wouldn't be of any use. Even a 2:1 might be better and only use the same amount of chips. Or did he dare enough to gamble at inside betting this early?
The croupier coughed expectedly and Will hurriedly placed his chips down. This night would be a gamble indeed.

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An hour later, winnings in hand, Will made a cautious path towards the elevator.

"Floor minus one please." The lift attendant's eyebrows raised imperceptibly.
"May I see your card sir?" He enquired politely.

Will shuffled in his pocket to reach the green plastic marked in gold with negative one. He was still in disbelief that the croupier had handed him the pass after having one of the best runs of luck in his life until the other players huffed and stormed away from the table.

"Very good sir."
The attendant nodded and stepped back to allow Will entry. Relief washed over him as he followed suit. The elevator chimed as it opened to reveal the floor below. The floor was lighter underfoot and ornate carpet rolled in front of him, pulling him towards the tables. He shuffled to the nearest card game, feeling slightly underdressed for the occasion. He could feel hungry eyes in the back of his ruffled hair as he settled. Will gave a terse smile to his competitors who already looked bored.

"It's fifty dollars minimum to be in," the dealer said.

He felt the weight of the chips in his hand and nodded.

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Dr Lecter, arrived at basement level at precisely 11pm. They recognised him almost immediately, the bartender fetching fresh bottles. His accomplishments as a psychiatrist had certainly helped build his reputation and his skill as one of the best international poker players. The sparkling chandeliers hung like shimmering clouds in the room as he made his way to the bar, catching snippets of bubbling conversation.

“Your usual, Dr Lecter?”
“If you’d be so kind,” he returned.

He stood against the obsidian bar patiently examining the scene before him. His opponents had not yet arrived. He wondered what thrills they may be enjoying. The last of a fine desert or if they couldn’t keep their hands off their mistresses for long enough. He caught himself scowling. He could admit it had been a while but he liked to think it was his high standards that kept him from following the nearest pretty face. It was always so much more interesting when they had a brain to probe too. He clutched his whiskey tighter at the thought of the last delicious scream he had kindled, the way their body had reacted to every touch until it last gave out.

He distracted himself with thoughts of his previous games. He almost smiled as he remembered the evening an arrogant Mongolian man had bet his tiger on a full house. It had been so satisfying to see his cheeks pale when four kings had been placed down in front of him. A rather portentous American had almost kept his personalised corvette too until an elegant blonde woman promptly unnerved the bald man into folding. Poker always had been enthralling.
He liked to play one or two games at the intermediate levels before making his way downstairs to that bottom floor where the single scheduled game of the night happens, sometimes occurring twice yearly but usually much rarer than that. After all, no one wants to lose a high stakes game too often, but tonight is one of those rare nights.

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Will was buzzing. On the fourth basement level, with air spiced in cologne and alcohol, Will had been granted his luck at the black jack table. Inside, he had hoped it was his skill but prayed that this streak would last now he’d managed to progress to a decent level. A small crowd had formed around the table, many older women and Will felt his face heat when he saw one of them wink.

“Hello there,” a voice caught him off guard as he took a well-deserved break, “couldn’t help but notice your skills are really quite impeccable!”
The man offered his hand.

“Dr Frederick Chilton, but please, call me Frederick.” The man’s smile didn’t reach his eyes.

A little startled and vaguely perplexed, he replied, “Will Graham.”

“A pleasure to meet you. I think I speak for everyone here when I say I’m quite impressed with your talents,”

“Believe me, it’s not something I do often,”

“A shame then,” murmured Dr Chilton, his eyes dipping to Will’s mouth, “I can already see your potential,”

Abashed, but still not quite at ease he replied carefully, “thank you, you play yourself?”

He took a moment to answer, “More of a poker player really,” It didn’t come as much of a surprise, something about Dr Chilton gave him the impression he had a good poker face. Perhaps it was that half-smile of his, or the way his tailored sleeve looked like it could fit an extra card.

“You seem like the type.”

“Thank you, I hope.” he chuckled quietly, “ever been tempted?”

“From time to time,” Will gave a non-committal answer.

“You don’t seem like the type.”

“I’m not currently wearing such a high-class tuxedo, if that’s what you’re referring to,”

The man half scoffs, “you don’t have to play dress up to play well although it does help,”

Will tilted his head in agreement.
“Perhaps, if you don’t mind accompanying me, you’d join me for a game downstairs Will?” Dr Chilton eyed Will with a knowing smile. Hell, what did he have to lose?

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The bailiffs had come on a Tuesday. It had poured outside and Will watched them as they heaved away the best loot they could find. They took the scrap metal he was meant to be using to fix up the last rickety boats for work but they wouldn’t listen when he implored them to leave it- it was that or the refrigerator they had said, and Will had been living off frozen meals for weeks on end: at this point it was too important to go.

Before then he’d always been self employed as a shipwright and at first had got some pretty good commissions out of it. A couple of long boats for some historical society, plenty of canal boats and the odd yacht or two- it had all gone swimmingly till a larger boat yard, one with more skilled people and proper uniforms had set up next door. They wouldn’t take him on, telling Will he didn’t have the right qualifications for their company. He suspected they were lying.

He continued even then, undeterred, but the final blow came from a bad report from one of the yacht owners. Will had just taken out a loan to pay for all the parts needed but the owner had accused Will of stealing his best wines and told him he’d scratched the paint work before he even had a chance to fix them in place. It seemed like a pretty lousy accusation when Will was never even allowed inside the yacht, under the threat he wouldn’t be paid for his work otherwise. Will had suspected the client was hiding something else in there instead. The rest

of his clients turned their noses up at him. Within the month there was no work left for him and he could swear he could feel the delight radiating from the rival shipyard.

He'd made it two months before he'd fallen behind on the rent. Another month past before his landlord had got bothered enough by this and the bank needed back the loan he'd taken out. Between them they sent enough bailiffs to hollow out his small flat of furniture and left it an empty shell.

They came back on Friday and took the fridge too.

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The game was in full swing. Four of his opponents, Hannibal had met before, but the other three were what made it interesting. One had clearly never played high stakes before, nervous and fiddling with his jacket under the table, running the material through his fingers. The rough fabric grated Hannibal's ears. The stone-faced Russian continued his second bottle of vodka. The woman next to him was dressed smartly too but unlike the other women in the room she donned a tuxedo with a bright blue cravat tucked neatly into her neck. It must be uncomfortable in such a warm room but perhaps it may be hiding something even more uncomfortable, Hannibal mused.

They played, uninterrupted for half an hour, chips sliding to and fro seamlessly. The opening of the door to accommodate new guests is unusual but not entirely unforgivable and it's only Hannibal who found himself glancing up at the incomers, the rest remaining engrossed.

He recognised the shorter man immediately, Dr Chilton. Hannibal's jaw clenched minutely, teeth locked. Chilton's familiar swagger was unabashed by the attention he drew, chin upturned and smug. His hands rested in his pockets, pulling at the stitching. The dark jacket he wore must be his favourite- small lumps and ripples stretch the fabric with overuse. It's not old enough to be vintage, not new enough to be chic. But still Chilton's satisfied smirk was shameless. Hannibal had thought Chilton had learned his lesson but he appeared again like a cockroach under a kitchen cupboard.

Hannibal's attention was drawn away by the man at Chilton's side. He was taller, slimmer too, but the way his suit hugged his frame perfectly outlined the broadness of his shoulders. The navy suit he wore was out of place with the shiny black tuxedos that circle like sharks. It's just the right amount of tight to glimpse the sinuous muscle underneath. His hair was a halo of brown curls framing his face, artfully debauched but angelic all the same. What Hannibal would give to see him wrecked. He slides his tongue over his teeth in anticipation. The sepia light from the chandelier reflects brightly in startled eyes whose pupils expand to take in the grand scene around him, still young and fascinated.

"Dr Lecter?" The dealer asks with a practised patience. He pulls his gaze away from the man. "Check."
The table moves on soundly, but then Hannibal notices the man's hand curled around Chilton's arm and feels a wave of wanting, of possessing, take hold of him. He smiles to himself, Hannibal has to have him.

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Will felt the heat of the crowd gazing at him. They were surrounded by whispering spectators. Will's grip tightens around Dr Chilton's arm to steady himself but it did nothing to stop the murmurs. He's under no illusions about the reason for their sudden attention. Dr Chilton seemed like a high-class man and undoubtedly being seen with a younger man barely thirty, when Chilton is pushing fifty would cause something of a stir, especially as out of place as Will is. A couple of the women smiled knowingly at him but it didn't help his pounding heart.

Will breathed deeply through his nostrils as they walked closer to the raised table in the centre of the room. He refused eye contact with the rest of the spectators, keeping his head fixed towards the players at the table who were too engrossed to notice them. He let his eyes wander to take in the lavish room. Even the ceiling was gilded gold.

He felt the sudden coldness on the back of his neck. When he looked back to the table again he locked eyes with one of the players. The man's gaze was so intense Will felt the need to look away but was instead transfixed. He sat regally, at home in a well-tailored tuxedo that accentuated the length of his torso, lapels pointed downwards so that Will's eyes started to follow their sleek lines downwards before he caught himself. He didn't dare let his gaze slip under the table to where the man's legs were spread just enough to be comfortable.

"Why don't you get yourself a drink?" Dr Chilton murmured into his ear. Will nodded hastily and slipped his arm free.
When he looked back the man is playing again.

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Two hours later, Will had drunk 4 different whiskeys, been propositioned twice by elder gentlemen and once by a rather scary looking brunette woman, then threatened by her husband. All of this would have been tolerable if not for the humiliation that Chilton was losing, badly. And to think Will believed himself to be a bad player. The rest of the players were either amused or irritated by Chilton's antics, barely able to suppress rolling their eyes when he revealed a three and a five, against his opponent's queen and jack. Even from the bar Will could see the vein in Chilton's neck bulging which aggravation. With any luck it might burst and Will could leave unnoticed in the subsequent panic.

Will had at least made it onto speaking terms with the bartender who happily narrated the game for him, even if Will felt he'd rather not know what was happening in quite such detail.
"Well, if he survives the next few minutes then he might make it out with at least some dignity," the man nods to Chilton.
"Not very optimistic then?" he grits out.
"I've watched most of them play before, including Dr Chilton." The bartender explained, "You can't fault him for persistence but the others adapt too quickly to any new tactics to bother trying to surprise them." He shook his head.
"Wonderful."

Hannibal could see Dr Chilton at the end of his tether and boiling with anger. Unlike the rest of the players Hannibal's expression remained quietly stoic in the vengeful atmosphere but he

has to remember to unclench his jaw.

The final straw comes when Chilton goes all in, shoving at his chips so they spill inwards in desperation. There were three players left: Hannibal, Chilton, and another regular. The regular folded, flicking her hair from her eyes and relaxing back into her chair. There's approximately $2.5 million on the table between them all. So far everyone had kept up enough but the cost of that is pushed onto Chilton. The rest of the table looked to Hannibal.

He flipped the chip between his fingers, thinking. The weight of the room rests on him but out of the corner of his eye the young man at the bar kept his eyes downcast on his drink.

Hannibal pushed his chips to meet Chilton's and allows himself a smile.
"All in."

The intake of breath was palpable as they waited for the cards to be revealed. People edged closer to the stage, ladies craning their bejewelled necks and thankful for their heels. The dealer motioned for Dr Chilton to reveal his cards and he does so without hesitation.

Queen of diamonds. 10 of clubs. Combined with the rest of the cards on the table Chilton earns himself a flush. A few nod their heads at the sudden appearance of luck.

Hannibal reveals his next: Ace of spades. Jack of spades. Four of a kind.

The room around him erupted into applause. Laughter bubbled out of tense silence as the crowd is once again reassured of Dr Lecter's superiority.
The dealer collected the cards back in and began another intricate shuffle but Chilton remained firmly at his seat. A new round was starting without dealing his cards.

"I will still play." He barked defiantly, voice loud but shaking.
"Dr Chilton-" began the dealer.
"With what money?" Interrupted the Russian briskly.
"I have something else you may accept." He replies primly, collecting himself as if he never burst.
"What would that be?"
"Will Graham." Chilton turned to the bar. They followed his line of sight and all 9 players stared at the young man perched on the velvet stool. Will looked up from his drink and startles as he sees them. How intimidating they must look, Hannibal smirked, all of them together like a hungry pack of wolves.
"You bet a whore?" The Russian spat but Chilton just sighed.
"I bet a very cooperative young man, but prostitute he is not."

The group argued between them, as did the rest of the room that chattered with indignation and amusement at the novelty. Opinions on ethical behaviour darted around but were shortly replaced with arguments over how much the man was even worth and each player had their own opinion, as did the dealer who valiantly tries to quieten them in vain.

Hannibal kept his eyes on Will who looked like he'd rather be just about anywhere else. He tried to keep himself as small and inobtrusive as possible which in another circumstance

might could possibly be endearing. However, the blush on Will Graham's face was invariably delectable. Hannibal has been offered a plate and now he wanted a bite.

"Let him play."

The others around him settled at this, some more pleased than others. Most fold immediately when the cards are given, if only so that they could enjoy better the spectacle before them. By the final round only Hannibal was left, alone again with Dr Chilton.

Hannibal revealed his cards with quiet grace.

"Nine of hearts. King of Hearts."

He looked up expectantly at Chilton, glazed over and lifeless. He threw his cards flippantly onto the table like he was gracefully skimming a stone, but one of them lands face down. The dealer made no move to get it. Instead, Chilton was forced to stand to reach it, chair scraping on the marble floor in the silence, and turned it slowly over.

"King of clubs. Ten of diamonds." The dealer announced to the rest of the room.

From where they stood, the spectators couldn't see the raised table, nor have many bothered to listen to each card called. They simply wait in silence, as they sip on champagne. There's more movement from the bubbles in their glass than there is in the room. Eyes flit from Lecter to Chilton, both the picture of serenity.
It's one of the other competitors who speaks first to break it.

"Dr Lecter's flush beats Chilton's straight." She smiled as she says it, lips curled. "Congratulations to our winner."

"That concludes our game for tonight," the dealer stood, "the bar remains open till five, I trust you all to have a pleasant evening." He nods once as if to assure himself. "May the winner collect his prize with me now."

Will downs his five hundred dollar whiskey in one.

End Notes

I really hope you enjoyed!

Let me know if you think it's worth a second chapter...

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!